

LGBT-TV (Part 1): Current queer problems in local media representation

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How are we Filipino queers being (re)presented in today's media, especially in the local television landscape?

It's already 2015. One would think that in this age of 24-hour cable television, anywhere/anytime online media access, and social media-fed instantaneous fame/feedback, the queer community would be happier in terms of how the les-

bians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and queer people are being depicted in local television. With the way the whole world is wired right now, one would think that the local television trends would somehow reflect what's trending in the global media world.

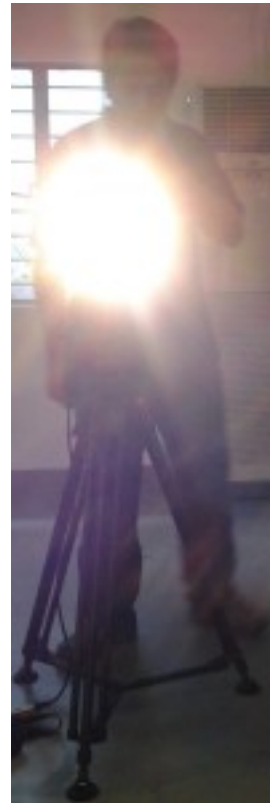
However, no matter how slow/fast our internet connects us to the world, the local television industry seems to be slower than your slowest broadband access when it comes to presenting more progressive issues about LGBTQs in Philippine television. And to a certain extent, this is quite understandable, given the kind of society we (still) have. However, I'm not sure if this is still acceptable, especially if we compare how the rest of the world is now faring and adjusting to certain demands and victories attained through social justice means.

But more than comparing local fare to international fare, the thought that needs investigating is this: Are queer depictions in local media being made in a humane way or a humiliating way? Why ask this? Because in a nutshell, here's the heart of the matter: No matter how we tout ourselves as progressive, the local television landscape still lacks proper LGBTQ representation and their current depictions leave much to be desired. Yes, even in 2015.

However, it is not enough to stop the investigations there. Yes, we are fans of identifying problems. But we should be bigger fans of presenting solutions or at least offering them as recommendations in order to have a better outcome. Yes, many sub-sectors have also done that before, and some continue to do so. But regardless of past outcomes, future progress should still be put forward by the actions of our present. And the present should always be subjected to scrutiny — for a better tomorrow.

And why is this type of investigation still relevant in today's "modern world," whatever modern might mean to you? Simple: media — much like the technology that delivers its content to us — is ever evolving. And if the content doesn't take shape to put forward more meaningful characters and representations, then media isn't fulfilling one of its, shall we say "God-given" mandate, to its expecting audiences: to disseminate information that is true, real, and accurate — without bias, without partisanship, and without prejudice.

As it is, we Filipinos are already attuned to how certain media institutions seem to have intrinsic biases woven within their media productions and presentations. And the number one bias we always see — which could perhaps be traced back to the history of Philippine media — is of a political nature. The greatest example of this is in television as we trace how the history of how ABS-CBN as a television station developed over the decades. Automatically, people see this as "the yellow channel" in reference to how the Aquinos were able to snatch it back from the dictatorial clutches of the Marcos cronies when the country won back its democracy in 1986. Nearly 30 years later and within a second Aquino-led government, audiences automatically assume that Channel 2 always sides with the government (at least Aquino-led ones) since there is this overarching "utang na loob" or debt of gratitude for bringing back the channel's reins in the hands of the Lopezes who lost it once during the Martial Law era. Yes, it's already 41 years after Martial Law was proclaimed, 34 years since it was lifted, and 29 years after we've won back our democracy, and the TV station still upholds this *utang na loob* after several gener-



ations have passed. I guess that's what we call "being Filipino?" Perhaps.

Thus, if Philippine media could have this certain political bias, what more social bias or cultural bias? And when it comes to social and/or cultural bias, it's certain that populations who exist within the margins of society would be the number one victims of such biases. The feminist movements have long battled such cul-



tural and social biases against women who have been relegated to non-progressive depictions within various sectors of society, media included. So what more for us queers, who continue to battle what the oppressed women have battled before — and continue to battle, actually? What can we say about this continued "othering" of our section of society?

This is where media, especially television, could be further investigated. How does the media continue this decades-old bias? How does this age-old bias take form in this modern time? More importantly, how could we eliminate this bias? And for those who think it's irrelevant, perhaps we should also investigate intersections and see where else such biases affect us when media bias is still present in the local landscape.

For this series, I would like to point out six pressing problems that are still evident in the Philippine television landscape that somehow directly or indirectly hinders us from seeing proper progressive depictions of our lives in local TV screens. I will explore each problem/situation in a more in-depth discussion in different articles of the series. I will wrap up the series by presenting some solutions and recommendations that we all could hopefully work on — together — in order to better this situation.

For now, let me identify these six pressing problems that I have observed. They are:

1. Media mainstreams only the mainstream concept of us.
2. Mainstream has relatively increased queer representation, but it's not that diverse.
3. The "real alternative" is seen only in alternative venues, still.
4. Philippine media generally ignores global progress regarding SOGIE issues.
5. Well-meaning Filipino media practitioners still struggle with the political economy of media.
6. Supposedly well-meaning media practitioners unknowingly alienate their real audiences.

I know that there will be those among us who would think that investigating such problems or trying to identify solutions would be a waste of time and effort. But I believe otherwise. If we don't try to at least investigate this big chunk of the intersection — namely mainstream media — then the other intersections of our lives will continue to be subjected to these age-old biases and prejudice against us LGBTQs. Yes, we all have our different approaches and ways of coping with certain victories and specific biases, but continued critical thinking won't hurt us, especially if it aims to fine-tune how we could live bias-free in this society we supposedly love.



Shall we start?

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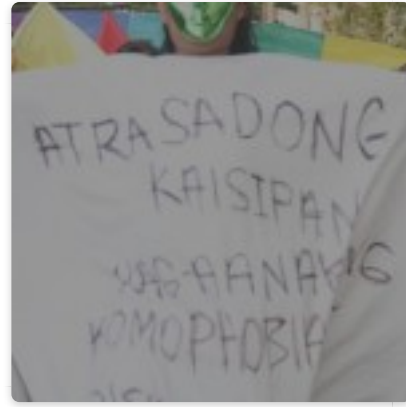
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